

# REPRESENTATION OF THE ELDERLY IN A MALAYSIAN ENGLISH DAILY

Maya Khemlani David<sup>1</sup> and Ponmalar N Alagappar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Malaya, Malaysia, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, mayadavid@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>University of Malaya, Malaysia, Section for Co-Curricular Activities, Elective Courses by Other Faculties and TITAS (SKET), [ponmalar.a@um.edu.my](mailto:ponmalar.a@um.edu.my); ponmalarna@gmail.com

## Abstract

Media play a vital role in the construction of social realism and thus knowledge of what is reported in the media is essential to understand social outlooks towards important issues. Aging of the population is one of these subjects in many countries including Malaysia. As Malaysia is likely to reach an aging nation status by 2035, with the number of people above the age of 60 reaching to 15 per cent of the population (NST, 23/11/2010), it is, therefore, important to study how the media represents the elderly in Malaysia. This study aims at finding out the way the Malaysian elderly populations are represented in a national English daily newspaper covering a five-year period, from 2007 to 2011. Content analysis was used to categorize and analyze texts relevant to elderly and a total of 326 news articles were identified with the words 'elderly, senior citizens or aged'.

**Keywords:** Elderly, content analysis, newspaper, Malaysia

## Background to the Study

World Health Organisation (2012) estimated that the world's population of people of 60 years of age and older has doubled since 1980 and is forecast to reach 2 billion by 2050. The elderly or elder people or old people or senior citizens are one of the fastest growing segments of the population. In Malaysia, the number of elderly persons, defined as those over the age of 60, is growing; there are one million elderly citizens in 1990 and 2.1 million in 2010 and by the year 2020, there will be 3.26 million elderly Malaysians and by the year 2050, one in every five Malaysians will be aged 60 or older (NST, 07/09/2010). As they are becoming a larger part of the population in Malaysia, it is important to determine how they are represented in public media

## Previous studies: Elderly image in newspapers:

Fon, Philip & Hee<sup>1</sup> overall findings of older people as models in advertisements showed that there was an under-representation of older adults in television advertisements in Malaysia and Korea. While older adults were given major roles in Korea, they were portrayed more in background roles in Malaysia. However, while a greater proportion of males were given major roles in Korea, the reverse was found in

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wbiconpro.com/london%20management/Ong\(420\).pdf](http://www.wbiconpro.com/london%20management/Ong(420).pdf)

the case of Malaysia where more females assumed major roles than males. The majority of males in Malaysia were given background roles. Although both countries are Asian countries, the historical background and the ethnic diversity in Malaysia might explain the difference in male and female portrayal by advertisers.

With an aim to discover how the elderly were presented and how that presentation may have changed over time in Taiwanese newspapers, Sai-hua Kuo (2009) conducted a corpus-based research.<sup>2</sup> Sai-hua Kuo (2009) studied a total of 240 news stories over 4 months (July-October) in 2007 collected from three Taiwanese newspapers- (a) *United Daily News* (UDN), the *China Times* (CT), and the *Liberty Times* (LT) and 157 news stories over the same four months in 1998. It was revealed that age-related news stories tended to appear in less prominent space, which was usually devoted to local or regional news. The number of age-related news had decreased significantly over time despite the growing population of the elderly. The chronological comparison had shown that older adults were presented in a more positive light. The increasing family violence/tragedies (e.g. murder, abuse, abandonment) caused by conflict between elderly parents and their children further indicated the changing role and status of the elders in the changing Taiwanese society, in which the traditional Confucian ethical principle of filial piety was diminishing.

Edel Murphy (2004),<sup>3</sup> conducted a study on older people and ageing issues in Irish newspapers found that older people mentioned in the national newspapers tend to be well-known figures in public life – currently in the public arena or in the news because they once were, a number of feature articles, little mention or in-depth discussion of critical ageing issues during the defined period and there is no mention of older people on the editorial pages or on the letters pages of any of the national newspapers.

Rozanova (2006) study on the portrayals of the elderly in terms of health and illness uncovered three major themes in which older adults and their health and illness were portrayed in *The Globe and Mail* in 2005: aging as disease, individual responsibility for healthy aging, and apocalyptic demography / costs of [un]healthy aging. The articles portrayed disease as an inevitable companion of aging, and openly or tacitly linked older age with various forms of physical and cognitive deterioration and decline. While the storylines of articles usually focus on treatment and sometimes on prevention, it is always assumed, tacitly or explicitly, that the cause of disease is age-related.

In response to some recent studies which suggested that the elderly were negatively portrayed in the mass media in many Western countries, Nicole Chui Shan Chan (2009), *Older people stereotypes in Hong Kong's print advertisements*,<sup>4</sup> investigated the situation in Hong Kong. By studying 10 print advertisements collected from *Oriental Daily*, it was found that the elderly were positively portrayed in the print advertisements in general. It was concluded that positive stereotypes and ideologies of older

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.ualberta.ca/~aac12009/PDFs/Kuo2009AACL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Older People & Ageing Issues in Irish Newspapers: A Preliminary Analysis. Retrieved from [http://olderinireland.ie/sites/all/files/Older\\_in\\_the\\_news.pdf](http://olderinireland.ie/sites/all/files/Older_in_the_news.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.english.hku.hk/LCOM%20paper/LCOM%20papers%20new,%20rev/2009%20vol2/5\\_Nicole\\_Chan.pdf](http://www.english.hku.hk/LCOM%20paper/LCOM%20papers%20new,%20rev/2009%20vol2/5_Nicole_Chan.pdf)

people are reinforced. These positive stereotypes and ideologies are attributed to Chinese Confucian culture.

The studies mentioned above have one features in common, they all have used content analysis and their findings range from positive to negative representation and sometimes even under-representation of the elderly citizens considering their ratio in the national population.

### **Agenda- Setting Theory**

The agenda–setting theory examines the media’s effect on the public’s perceived importance of issues. According to Gharparde, 1986 (in Emily Eoff, 2002), the agenda-setting theory is a relational concept that specifies a transfer of salience from agenda primers (media) to agenda adopters (consumers). This is because agenda setting stems the formation of public opinions and the distribution of advantages and disadvantages of a particular issue.

More, specifically the media forces attention on certain issues and influences the salience or importance of topic on the opinions/attitudes of the general public (Mc Combs & Shaw, 1972). Conrad and Markers (2001) explain that it is through everyday news work – selecting what to report, locating and quoting commentary of experts, and organizing and presenting the news, that newspaper companies provide the agenda for public discourse

Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney (1998) state that the idea behind agenda setting is simple: the media over time, by featuring some issues more prominently and some issues less prominently and still other issues not at all, give us a sense of what issues are important, namely the extent of political or public importance a particular issue possesses. In fact Conley and Lambie (2006) argue “... *that no other business sets the agenda for public debate to the extent media do*” (p25).

Two basic assumptions underline most research on agenda-setting a) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it and b) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive these issues as more important than other issues (Gewijzigd, 2003). In effect therefore, the agenda setting role of the news media is a form of hegemony that is evident the world over (David and Pavlik, 2003). Allan, S., 1998 (cited in David & Pavlik, 2003) said that news media can be viewed as production in direct accordance with the interest of a ruling class or bloc.

This is manifestly clear in Malaysia as media is largely owned or directly controlled by the 14 political parties which constitute the ruling party (Kenyon & Marijoribanks, 2007). Media Prima owns the New Straits Press (M) Bhd (NSTP) which publishes the English language newspapers, New Straits Times, New Sunday Times, Malay Mail, Sunday Mail and the Malay language newspapers, Berita Harian, Berita Minggu and Harian Metro; Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Bhd (TV3), 8TV, Channel 9 and ntv 7; and Media Prima is said to be associate with UMNO, the major party in the Barisan Nasional coalition which is the ruling party (Mustafa, 2005).

## Research questions

The following research questions were examined:

1. How often does New Straits Times portray news stories of the elderly community?
2. What sorts of news stories were given importance and were there emerging subject matter/themes that recurred?
3. Has the presentation varied over time?
4. What was the importance of the news stories about the elderly in terms of :
  - a. Number of news stories related to the elderly
  - b. Section where the news stories appeared

## Methodology

A combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis of content is used in this study to explore the media coverage of the elderly issues in Malaysia. Content analysis has been defined as a research technique for the objective systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Peng, 2004, p59). Content analysis helps reveal how the elderly are portrayed in the mass media, which, in turn, reflects the access this group has to the mainstream media (Martin, 2008).

The quantitative method was used to measure the duration and frequency of the news reported and qualitative analysis was used to interpret the viewpoints presented by the news articles. This supports what Smith, 1975 (cited in Yan 2006, p. 2), suggests, that the same blend of both quantitative and qualitative analysis should be used “..because qualitative analysis deals with forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with duration and frequency of form.”

Analysing the content, we wanted to establish and document the basic features and characteristics of newspaper reporting and the way in which the newspaper represented issues regarding the elderly. The most important indicators of coverage content are, of course, themes or topics, since they reflect what the media staff perceives as newsworthy about a group (Ma & Hildebrandt, 1993).

For this purpose, we chose an English newspaper, based on its circulation, readership and a complete online archives database. There are three main daily English newspapers in Malaysia i.e. New Straits Times (NST), The Star and the Sun. These three newspapers do vary to some extent in the way they select and present news to their readers.

Among these newspapers, NST was chosen for the study because it had a complete online archives database which is easily accessible, it is one of the oldest newspapers that was founded in 1845 and is said to be an influential newspaper in Malaysia. NST has 63% market domination, 600 000 copies sold daily on average and 3, 350 monthly visitors at their websites (<http://www.nst.com.my>).

The search for the articles was done manually through the use of the archives online database. First, each article from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011 was scanned and if the word “elderly, senior citizens or aged” appeared, the news articles were marked. The unit of analysis was the whole item, whether it was a news story, an editorial, a letter to the editor, or an opinion column. A total of 326 articles were identified on the elderly issues in the 5 year time frame period.

The identified articles were sorted by the number of articles, placement of article and recurring themes. In order to conduct the content analysis in this study, the qualitative method was used first to identify

the prominent themes in the identified articles. The 326 articles were read by two research assistants to establish an initial set of themes. The 326 articles were reviewed by the second author and two other trained independent coders. Once the intercoder reliability was reached, the final themes were identified for qualitative analysis.

Four main themes with their subthemes were identified the emerging themes clearly showed how the elderly community was portrayed in the newspaper. In the case of two themes appearing in one article, one, the main theme, was taken into account for the purpose of this study. The focus of the news stories was taken into consideration when overlapping of themes occurred. This is similar to the analysis procedure used by Zorica, R. et.al (2004) and Conrad & Markens (2001).

## Findings

There were a total of 326 news articles with the word “elderly, senior citizens or aged” from January 2007 to December 2011 (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of news articles on the elderly from the year 2007-2011

Year	Total Number of Articles
2007	59
2008	55
2009	81
2010	85
2011	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>326</b>

In the years 2009 and 2010 there was an increase in the number of relevant news articles by approximately 48%, which was due to the change in the political situation in Malaysia. Dato Seri Najib Tun Razak, became the prime minister of Malaysia on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 ([www.kpm.gov.my](http://www.kpm.gov.my)) and one of his policies was to concentrate on minority groups and as such, there were many privileges and facilities arranged for the aged community.

An analysis by month for the five years, revealed in detail the trend of the news articles in portraying the elderly community (Table 2). From the projection, it can be inferred that generally, news stories on the elderly did not warrant a significant space in the newspaper i.e. there was an average of 4 news articles every month except in 2009 and 2010 when there was an average of 7 news stories a month due to government initiatives.

Table 2: Total Number of news articles according to month from the year 2007 to 2011

News articles on the Elderly	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
January	4	5	22	1	2	34
February	5	1	23	15	2	46
March	8	7	12	0	2	29
April	16	1	0	0	2	19
May	7	2	0	2	6	17

<b>June</b>	2	3	4	7	3	19
<b>July</b>	4	4	4	7	3	22
<b>August</b>	2	10	4	11	4	31
<b>September</b>	2	7	2	8	3	22
<b>October</b>	4	5	6	15	9	39
<b>November</b>	3	4	2	12	8	29
<b>December</b>	2	6	2	7	2	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>326</b>

Table 2 indicates that the number of published articles in the months of February and October was the highest followed by January and August. In the year 2009, there were 22 articles published in the month of January and 23 in February. One of the reasons may be that Chinese New Year was celebrated on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January and it is a month long celebration. It is embedded in the Malaysian culture that during festivals big corporations organize community projects for the less fortunate, underprivileged and this includes the less privileged elderly.

Similar inference will get momentum in the month of October in the year 2010 when the country celebrated Hari Raya and Deepavali many large organizations and government departments held charitable events for the elderly community in old folk's homes. Extensive coverage was given by the newspaper during the festive season and each story significantly contributed to the increase on news stories of the elderly.

Further analysis was done on the placement of news articles on the elderly from January 2007 to December 2011 (Table 3).

Table 3: Placement of news stories by section heading from the year 2007 – 2011

<b>Section Heading</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Main Section</b>	40	33	44	39	20	176
<b>Streets</b>	10	14	16	28	26	94
<b>Supplement</b>	0	0	3	3	0	6
<b>Niexter</b>	0	0	1	1	0	2
<b>Life &amp; Times</b>	0	2	9	13	0	24
<b>1 Klassifieds</b>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Tech &amp; u</b>	5	2	2	0	0	9
<b>Property</b>	0	3	4	0	0	7
<b>Your Money</b>	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Travel</b>	3	0	1	0	0	4
<b>Business Times</b>	1	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>326</b>

A careful look on Table 3 will reflect that most of the articles were placed in the main section, which usually focuses on the latest and important news stories (<http://www.nst.com.my>) and Streets (pullout). The news articles on the elderly published in the main section of NST were about general and social

issues, statements made by government officials on matters pertaining to the elderly i.e. funding and health, facilities provided, community projects and the publicity given to the corporate social responsibility projects organized by large organizations for the elderly community.

The Streets is a pullout section in NST which is divided into 3 regions, central, northern and Johor. Normally, the Streets focus on lifestyle, current issues and social problems among the community (<http://www.nst.com.my>). As in the main section, the news stories here only concerned general and social issues of the elderly in a negative or positive way. This showed that the elderly articles have been primarily concerned with social issues and less with economy, political international and development issues.

From the initial set of categories, the main themes were deduced. There was a 90% consistency in the emergence of the main theme and sub-themes among the four coders. Each main theme was sorted into subthemes to see the type of topics that made news within the theme (Table 4).

Table 4: Categorization of new stories on the main theme and sub themes.

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Corporate Social Responsibility</b>	<b>Government Aid</b>	<b>Health</b>	<b>General</b>
<b>Sub themes</b>	Donations-Monetary	Facilities	Medical expenses	Accident or Death
<b>Sub themes</b>	Donations-Non Monetary	Health	Medical facilities	Filial piety
<b>Sub themes</b>	Community Projects	Employment	Awareness on illness of elderly	Inspiration and Achievements
<b>Sub themes</b>		Citizenship	Others	Crime
<b>Sub themes</b>		Funding		Others

On the basis of this categorization, yearly news articles are again projected in the following way:

Table 5: Total number of news articles according to main themes

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Corporate Social Responsibility</b>	13	10	36	27	18	<b>104</b>
<b>Government Aid</b>	23	30-	27	34	26	<b>140</b>
<b>Health</b>	7	8	10	13	0	<b>38</b>
<b>General</b>	16	7	8	11	2	<b>44</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>320</b>

From the Table 5, it is evident that the focus of media attention was on government aid, which was mainly on the involvement and the role of the Malaysian government in addressing the elderly issues socially and economically (Tables 4 & 5). This was followed by corporate social responsibility, issues pertaining to monetary issues and donations in kind and community projects. The health theme covered various issues pertaining to healthcare of the elderly and the general theme related to the daily happenings within the elderly community.

Table 6: Total number of news stories on Government Aid according to the subtheme

<b>Government Aid</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>General Facilities</b>	14	18	10	17	13	72
<b>Employment</b>	1	2	0	0	3	3
<b>Citizenship</b>	1	0	0	2	3	3
<b>Funding</b>	3	9	2	13	11	38
<b>Health</b>	4	1	15	2	2	24
<b>Total</b>	23	30	27	34	26	140

Table 6 depicts that under the government aid theme, news articles mainly focused availability or the lack of general facilities provided by the government and health related issues. The news articles highlighted the government efforts to provide a better quality of life for the elderly in terms of public transport like special seats allocation and discounted fares, quicker service at the government departments, providing specialized training for the caregivers of the elderly and more security for the elderly. This also included letters from the public complaining of the lack of facilities provided by the government for the elderly especially transportation and housing, included the unfriendly and unhelpful treatment towards elderly community when using the public facilities.

Simultaneously, the government had allocated funding in terms of loans or scholarships for the elderly to continue their studies. There were many news stories on funding right after the budget announcement on the aids and allocation for the elderly amounting to 166 million, the allocation included the monthly allowance of RM300 to the eligible elderly in Malaysia (NST, 21/04/2010). In terms of citizenship issues, the government highlighted the fact that it would be easier for the stateless/the elderly lacking documents to obtain their citizenship as the government had simplified the process. In terms of employment the government highlighted the issue of possible part-time jobs for the elderly and retirement issues; the government has extended the retirement age from 55 to 60.

Under the health theme, the news articles were mainly about illnesses that affect the elderly, the care that is needed, health check-ups provided by the government hospitals, home care provided by trained nurses, the need for trained occupational therapist and the availability of government homes for the elderly. An increase in the aged group is often associated with an increase in the prevalence of ill health (NST, 4/9/2010). Of interest was the Health Ministry concern of the mental health problems faced by the elderly and the Malaysian Health Ageing Society together with University Putra Malaysia held a series of lectures and workshops on care for the elderly (NST, 17/7/2010)

Pertinent to mention here that generally the news articles on government aid contain statements of government officials or the ministry on the different initiatives taken by the government to help the elderly and the focus was on the giver, not the receiver and the elderly were mentioned secondarily, as government aid recipients.

Table 7: Total number of news stories on Corporate Social Responsibility according to the sub theme

<b>CSR</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Donations- Monetary</b>	1	3	21	8	6	39
<b>Donations-Non Monetary</b>	1	3	9	3	6	22
<b>Community Projects</b>	11		6	16	6	43
<b>Total</b>	13	10	36	27	18	104

The next theme of focus was corporate social responsibility. Under the corporate social responsibility theme, news stories mainly focused on monetary assistance or donations in kind by corporate organizations (Table 7). The news covered events where assistance were provided by corporate organizations and university students for the elderly in old folks homes to help create awareness about the plight of the elderly, on the importance of filial piety and the need for someone to care and to spend time with them.

It will be relevant to share here that this is a common practice in Malaysia that during festivals, there is an increase in the acts of corporate social responsibility as this is seen as a way to give back to the society by helping the needy and the neglected groups. Other reasons could be that the Malaysia government encourages large corporations to help the underprivileged groups by giving tax exemptions on the amount donated for charitable purposes provided that the charitable organizations are registered with the government and as a way to increase charitable activities.

The news articles have depicted the elderly as welcoming such aid, and this only intensifies the portrayal of the elderly as a dependent community- dependent both on government and private organizations for help or aid. The elderly are seen as people who need help and unable to fend for themselves, creating an unfavorable image of the elderly.

Table 8: Total number of news articles on Health according to the sub-theme

<b>Health theme</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Medical Expenses</b>	2	1	0	0	0	3
<b>Medical facilities</b>	1	4	4	4	0	13
<b>Awareness on illness</b>	3	3	4	8	0	18
<b>Others</b>	1	0	2	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	7	8	10	13	0	38

News articles on the health theme were mainly on private medical organizations, issues revolved around the cost of hospitalization, discounts and promotions offered by the various private hospitals, medical checkups (i.e. eye-examination), early detection of illness ( Alzheimer's, vision loss and

malnutrition), illness that affect the elderly and the disability issue faced by the elderly. As stated by Murphy (2004) in his study of the representation of the elderly in an Irish newspaper, Alzheimer's disease was the most prominent and that most news items on Alzheimer's disease focused on potential cure but not on the continued personal and creative development of people with the illness or challenges faced by the elderly.

The increase in the aging population also being about the number of age- related macular degeneration (AMD) cases, it is believed that 5% of the elderly population of the elderly is suffering from AMD (NST, 7/9/2010) The news articles also stressed the need for specialized care for the elderly to cater for the 2.16 million on the elderly people above 60, and those affected by lifestyle diseases and disability problems.

News stories on health were prominent as Malaysia is likely to reach an ageing nation status by 2035, with the number of people above the age of 60 reaching 15 per cent of the population (NST, 23/11/2010). Malaysia needs at least 5,000 occupational therapists by 2015 to cater to the 2.16 million elderly people above the age of 60, and those affected by lifestyle diseases and disability problems.

Table 9: Total number of news stories on General issues according to the sub theme

<b>General</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Filial Piety</b>	7	2	4	10	2	25
<b>Inspiration and Achievement</b>	3	2	1	0	0	6
<b>Crime</b>	5	3	3	1	1	12
<b>Others</b>	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	16	7	8	11	2	<b><u>44</u></b>

The next theme encompassed general issues that affect the everyday lives of the elderly. There were news stories on inspiration and achievement, crime and victimization, filial piety and public support.

The main highlighted news articles were on filial piety and caring for the elders by celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day. The news articles were rather general in nature i.e. celebrating Mother's Day and Father's Day and the need to instill the strong family value of filial piety.

On the other hand, there is the lack of filial piety among the children which is worrying trend (NST, 5/7/2007), letters to editors by the general public have highlighted the fact that today's generation compare the aged parents to Pudu prison (NST 28/6/2010), and the question now arises who would be caring for them? Aged citizens are being abandoned by their families at a time when they should be living in dignity and be tenderly cared for by their loved ones.

The theme of crime carries the news stories that contain both crime stories by the elderly and towards the elderly. The crime against elderly included snatch theft, abuse and robbery. The crimes committed by the elderly were basically sodomy and rape of underage boy or girl (NST, 7/8/2007 and 24/11/2007).

## **Discussion**

It is important for society as a whole that older people are, and are seen to be, an integral part of society (Murphy, 2004). If this is true, the elderly in Malaysia are then seen as a dependent group needing much aid from the government and the private sector.

The articles on the elderly appeared to be largely about the giving of aids to the elderly, and health issues. There were few articles on the inspiration given by the elderly or their achievements, only 6 articles in the five year period. While there were articles on the government giving discounts on postgraduate degrees fees for those over a certain age and on encouraging the elderly to come back to work at least on a part time basis, there were no articles on the number of the elderly doing post graduate degrees or on the actions actually taken to hire the elderly by the government or the private sector and on the statistics of elderly persons returning to the work force. Such articles would see the elderly as being proactive, still willing to learn and develop themselves and still having a role to play due to their experience and maturity of thinking.

The emphasis on corporate social responsibility made it seem that the elderly are just waiting for hand-outs. A significant percentage of the articles pertaining to the elderly were about health linking the elderly to being vulnerable to all kind illness. This coverage tends to portray undesirable image of older people as being ill and dependent, and a burden on public resources (Murphy, 2004).

On the whole it would appear that the elderly did not warrant a significant or regular space in the newspaper. However, most of those news articles were placed prominently in the main section or in the Streets pullout section so they were likely to make an impression on the readers. However, these news stories were mainly statements made by government officials or the media hype given to corporate social responsibility projects by corporate organizations for the elderly community. Furthermore, news stories on corporate social responsibility projects only depicted elderly people living in institutional settings i.e.in old folk's homes.

Though the news articles were positive i.e. in terms of extending a helping hand to the needy and in getting the youth involved in charitable work, on the same note it also gives an unfavorable view of the elderly as being needy and having health issues which would increase with time. The news stories did not portray elderly people as leading an active lives but as dependent on their children and other aid givers and emphasized the health problems faced by the elderly . In fact only a portion of the elder citizens were targeted by the newspapers for certain social and political purposes and the bulk of this dynamic sector of the community is neglected.

## **Conclusion**

Some of the elderly may need physical and financial help while like any other group; they are social beings who need social interaction. Some have no family while others are neglected by their family and these may lack the emotional attachment and loving environment we all need.

Traditionally, Malaysia has a strong sense of filial piety and most families take care of their elders with love and respect. But today, families have moved to urban areas for work and educational opportunities and women have increasingly chosen to join the workforce as a result, many old people are looked after by maids or send to a retirement or elderly folks' homes to be cared for.

Readers or viewers may be limited in their ability to evaluate the accuracy of the stories they read or the images they view without direct personal experience or specific background knowledge of an issue (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001). The selection of news articles that are featured and highlighted tells the readers the gravity of the issue of concerning the elderly and in this way it sets/fixes the agenda on the issue of involving the elderly. The news articles had revolved in giving hype to the government and corporate organizations for their largess in donating, providing facilities and funding for the elderly, which had portrayed the act of benevolent. The emphasis to the health issues of the elderly had been informative in terms of understanding and coping in terms of what to expect when one grows old.

The media had steered the readers to understand the importance of news issues in different ways. The newspaper had addressed the issue of the elderly as a general issue in the society presenting the issue in a neutral way by highlighting the situation faced by the elderly, allowing its' readers to decide on the importance of the issue and the need for action, if any. Newspapers could play an important role in stimulating, supporting and developing critical thinking on such issues among the public (Murphy, 2004).

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